TAXI

An Adventure Romance

By

GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

"Hold on, there!" said Mr. Randolph, and divested himself of cap to one, overcoat to another, gloves to the third, and asked the fourth for a light. "Herbert," he continued, in modulated tones, "the cab outside is waiting for Mr. R. H. Randolph. It may be there for some time. Have an eye kept on it."

"Yes, Mr. Randolph. I'll see to it, Mr. Randolph. George, Mr. Randolph's letters."

"Never mind the letters," countermanded the oft-named one, and proceeded to thread his way to a certain small room strategically placed well within the depths of the edifice and far from the maddening tumult of the streets. The said apartment at the moment of his arrival contained five occupants seated round a circular table of convenient height and clothed in pale green, kindest of all shades to the eye of man. There were no mirrors on the walls.

Mr. Randolph's entry was greeted first with consternation and then with shouts.

"Bobby, you old scout!"

"Herv, by great balls of sweat."

"Randy, from where the devil?"

The speakers arose and pump handled Mr. Randolph's arm.

"Ye gods, man, where you been? Strayed in from a fancy dress?"

"Never mind the glad rags, fellows," said Mr. Randolph. "I was just feeling lonely for the sound of chips. Room for another?"

"The surest thing! You don't know these two chaps, do you? Mr. Seegar, passed on to us from 'Frisco, and Mr. Bowling-True, our latest new member. Gentlemen, this is Mr. Randy Randolph of New Haven and New York, in disguise but still the best ever."

"Table stakes?" murmured Mr. Randolph, as he took his place, apparently at random, but at the left of the two comparative strangers.

"Of course! Same old ante. Same old game. You talk as though you'd been away for a month."

For a moment, but for a moment only, Mr. Randolph was dazed. Was it possible that the last three weeks hadn't been a year? He drew out his sixty-eight dollars and fifty cents nonchalantly, as though they were merely the loose change he had on his person, bought fifty in chips, and laid the small heap of what was left of his cash on the board. The strain on his nerves during the next half-hour put that of the five days' wait for a hunch on the Street to the blush. There came a moment when all his chips were gone, and he was forced to see with a full house for his small pile of change only.

"Serves you right, Randy," said Mr. Mein. "For forgetting to pile up the ready in a table-stake game; there are two and a half million walking the streets—"

"Oh, stow it!" murmured Mr. Randolph, as he counted out his share amounting to ninety-two dollars and fifty cents, and pushed across the rest of the fat pot to the next best hand. He looked up and smiled. "Boys," he remarked frankly, "I'm riding a hunch with four legs. Watch me."

Five spectators did, but got little excitement of their pains. Mr. Randolph was playing that most difficult and uninteresting of poker corollaries—a tight game. Mr. Seegar turned impatient as the conviction grew upon him that he had run up against the original hard-shell who never drew to less than a pair of tens, never bluffed, and could surrender three kings without a sigh to a low straight unseen. He began to make facetious remarks in connection with the safety-first campaign which was then at its height.

Mr. Randolph nursed his pile through five long hours up to eighteen hundred dollars. Then it was that he suddenly met a raise of two hundred on the part of Mr. Seegar, tacked on three hundred more, waited for that individual to throw in his very good hand, face up, with the resigned smile of a wise one, and then carelessly displayed in the same manner, his own three-flush, so bobtailed that the ascension of the S. P. C. A. should have been called to the case.

The roar of laughter that went up from all but Mr. Seegar was more full and free than even such occasions usually produce. Mr. Mein pounded Mr. Randolph on the back.

"Bobby, old boy," he said, "that was the eternalest, patientest, and deepest-laid trap I've ever witnessed in a life-long pursuit of the only national pastime!"

The light merely flickered in Mr. Randolph's blue eyes, and he returned to his old job of sawing wood. Not for nothing had he made that grandstand flourish, and his object had been gained. A new seriousness, masked in cold-edged, classic poker smiles, settled upon the table as a whole. The idea that they were gathered together merely to while away an idle evening faded into the background, and, one by one, like stars coming out at evening time, supper trays began to make their appearance. All but Randolph, they had been toying with poker; now they began to play it.

That gentleman continued for the nonce the even tenor of his stride except for a Lenten concession to his insides. He ordered placed on a stand at his elbow a large jug of ice water and a platter containing four dozen sandwiches. No added touch could have done more toward persuading his friendly antagonists that he, Randolph, was out for thick blood. If any one of the five had joyed in the knowledge that two slices, thin, of buttered bread embracing a sliver of meat had been named eternally after the earl of Sandwich on just such an epochal occasion as this, he would probably have seen the high sign and beat it for home and bed.

Night was fast joining the discard when the weary Herbert dared to interrupt.

"Please, Mr. Randolph, the officer on the beat says the grass is lifting

"The Officer on the Beat Says the Grass Is Lifting Your Cab, Sir."

your cab, sir, and he thought he ought to report anything like that."

"Tell him to undo the check and let it feed itself down again," growled Mr. Randolph.

The day passed; night fell. Now one and then another of the six devotees of a science which even in the youth of this nation had forestalled all the wonders of the submarine, the flight of man, and wireless telegraphy withdrew just long enough to connect with the Daily Night bank round the corner or some other convenient base of supplies and returned to set new money to catch old. But Mr. Randolph had no occasion to do this. His heap of chips and cash of the realm rested on too solid a base of its own.

There may be recorded an amusing diversion from the serious business in hand. It was ushered in by the crest-fallen Herbert, who confessed that actual physical exhaustion had driven him to forty winks, during which time a professional purloiner of motor-car accessories had stopped, spellbound by the gigantic sum registered on Mr. Randolph's taximeter, had promptly stolen the preposterous clock, and was now on the club steps offering to settle with whoever was the interested gent on a fifty-fifty basis.

Great was the consternation of the enterprising speculator in theft when he was confronted by two persons in one; namely, Mr. R. H. Randolph, lessee of Car No. 1898, and Mr. R. H. Randolph, alias Slim Hervey, the irate driver of said cab. His glib tongue, loaded to the gills with arguments as to how much the fare would save through the sudden exit of the clock from the ken of man, tripped hopelessly on this vision of wrath in the shape of a driver in whose interests the ticker had been faithfully slaving.

It took Mr. Randolph just thirty-two precious minutes to force the crest-fallen one to replace and readjust the busy bee of meter readings. When he returned to the fray upstairs, he noticed a strange phenomenon of poker—

age, unmistakable age, had settled on the faces of the five youths. He put his fingers to his own countenance; he could feel the added years.

The game ended, as do all titanic battles, in absolute silence. Mr. Randolph sorted, stacked, tabulated his winnings, and stuffed them into all the pockets on his person. He then noted the hour—eleven o'clock of a bright Thursday morning—and, proceeding to the nearest telephone booth, called up Mr. William Verries of Verries & Cat, stock brokers.

"That you, William? This is Bob Randolph. William, I've got sixteen thousand dollars in my jeans at the moment of speaking. What's the lowest margin you'll give me to sell Amal. I. S. & C. short for delivery at tomorrow's closing?"

"Sell Amal. I. S. & C. short!" gasped Mr. Verries. "Why, you're crazy! Buy, and I'll talk to you."

"I don't want to buy," said Mr. Randolph patiently. "You're right, in a way, about my being crazy. You see, since you saw me the other day, I've come into some easy long stuff, and it's just ruining my experiment in the philosophy of a moneyless life. I want to lose my wad just like I told you, and if you don't promise to start selling for me inside of the next five minutes, I'll let friendship slide and call up some real brokers."

"Well, if you put it in that way, you escaped loon, I'll assist your sap-headed philosophy to your exact cash limit. When will you pony up?"

"In twenty minutes by the clock," said Mr. Randolph cheerfully, and rang off.

The historic pounding drive on Amal. I. S. & C. that started with the opening of the market on the following day was of such Homeric proportions that the advance sale made by Messrs. Verries & Cat on behalf of Mr. R. H. Randolph during the Thursday afternoon next preceding was a mere drop in the bucket of oblivion to the public at large—a mere flea-bite lost in the shuffling of epidermises to the monster saurians involved in the combat; but to Mr. Randolph, it was a matter of transcendent importance.

With a feeling of great relief over an order that he had placed with his tailor nine days previously for complete new afternoon and evening outfits, the successful hunchbuster collected one hundred and thirty-two thousand, thirty-eight and no hundredths dollars and proceeded to turn in his wagon to the Village Cab company, together with the highest clock reading ever known in the history of Manhattan. He then chartered one of the vehicles for hire of that concern and directed it to carry him to his new clothes.

At ten minutes to four, he emerged from his tailor's, garbed in the very latest thing in slim-line morning coats, a top hat, pearly-striped trousers, spats, a mottled, platinum-handled, snakewood stick, and a gardenia in his buttonhole. Ignoring the wise and friendly-sneering look on the face of the cab driver, who was none other than our old friend of saturnine visage, Patrick O'Reilly by name, fallen on evil times, and re-engaged that very day on Mr. Randolph's recommendation, he gave a certain address in Fifty-ninth Street.

Let us now break one of the cardinal rules of narrative for cash by ruthlessly switching the objective point of view. Behold Miss Imogene Pamela Thornton dressed in a ravishing, modestly modern tea-gown effect that would have cost her great-great-grandmother a ducking in the pond off Bleecker street if she had dared to wear it in her day at a fancy-dress ball, pacing up and down Mr. Randolph's recent sitting room and counting off nine on her fingers for the hundred and eighty-sixth time.

And then, at last, the bell! Tomlinson, his jaw set grimly, advanced upon the door. For an agonizing

"Wo-won't You Sit Down?"

small moment, Pamela held her breath, and then let it go with a rush as she heard the old valet's sonorous voice tinged, nay, reeking, with the joy of welcome.

"Glad to see you back, Master Robert. Miss Thornton will receive you in the sitting room." Followed jingling sounds as Tomlinson disconnected the doorbell.

He was right in surmising that his former employer did not require a guide, but, as it turned out, there was no reason why he should not have witnessed the very proper meeting which took place between the two outwardly cool young members of society who were inwardly, nevertheless, seething with more emotions than there are fumes in a lime-kiln.

"Miss Thornton!" exclaimed Mr. Randolph, as, from force of long habit, he laid hat, stick and gloves on a side table and then advanced with a tentatively outstretched hand.

"Oh, how do you do?" asked Pamela, rising and offering her hand. "Wo—won't you sit down?"

"Thank you; I will."

He took the other end of the couch, crossed his legs in an effort to appear thoroughly at home, and gazed almost furtively at the apparition before him: Ye gods and heaps of daffodils! What a vision of loveliness, of charm, grace, breeding, carriage and nurtured beauty! What a bubbling well of mirth; what a source of the light of youth that never fails; what an armful of divine delight!

"Er—I—er—told Mr. Milyuns I'd call," said Mr. Randolph.

"Yes?" eagerly countered Miss Thornton.

"Er—I—said I'd be here at four," supplemented Mr. Randolph.

"Yes; he told me," murmured Miss Thornton, not quite so ardently.

"Er—it's just four now," stated Mr. Randolph.

"So it is," agreed Miss Thornton quite coolly, glancing at the clock and registering surprise—tone quite calm and dignified.

A long silence intervenes. The lady could easily break it, but won't. She has gathered somewhere that silence is often a club. Mr. Randolph evidently shares the intuition; he must say something and does.

"I've been very busy since I saw you last."

"How interesting!"

"Yes; it has been—in spots. I've—er—been studying the under side of the upper world through a hole in the front glass of a taxi. It has given me a great idea."

"Really?"

"Yes; I'm going to start the Manhattan Chaperoned Cab company."

"The what?" asked Miss Thornton, forced to show interest in the preposterous project in spite of the fact that her eyes were growing more and more wounded and the corners of her tremulous mouth were drooping farther and farther south.

"Chaperoned Cab company," repeated Mr. Randolph, his broad brows puckering in serious thought over his wide blue eyes. "It doesn't sound like much of an idea until you follow it out. Would you like to have me explain it to you?"

"Oh, ce—certainly."

"Well, it all hangs on an invention of my own—an attachment to the ordinary taximeter of a miniature map of New York and vicinity and a sort of seismic-needle affair. You set the needle on the point in the map corresponding to where the cab starts from in—er—real life. Wherever the cab goes, the needle shows the route in red ink on the map, with a time signal of how long it stopped at any given house, park, store—er—et cetera. Do you begin to get the idea?"

"N—no," said Miss Thornton.

"Just think a minute. Tired old couple of conventional ideas and actually beyond the age of dancing are in horror of sitting up all night watching daughter have a good time. Send her in one of my cabs; the ink-route will show just how straight she went to the party, how long she stayed, and how she came back. I forgot to mention the dictograph attachment in every vehicle. Take another case: Man married to a pretty and very young wife. Can't you hear him say, 'Yes, my d-d-dear; you can go anywhere if you'll take a Chaperoned Cab?'"

"No, I can't," said Miss Thornton decisively, and stared meaningly at the clock, as though she were worrying over her next engagement.

Mr. Randolph flushed, rose hastily, and possessed himself of hat, stick and gloves.

"I mustn't keep you," he said, "I've got an appointment in about five minutes myself."

She rose, an absent-minded look in her eyes, and accompanied him to the door of the room. He opened it and took his hand from the knob to shake good-by. Her hand reached out toward his listlessly, as though it had become infected with the selfsame droop that had assailed the corners of her lips.

"May I—er—call again?"

"No!" cried Pamela, snatched back her hand, threw both arms up against the doorjamb, dropped her curly head upon them, and burst into tears.

Mr. Randolph's platinum-headed cane fell with a clatter; his gloves fluttered to the floor, and his new top hat, emitting a clucking, mirthful sound, hurtled across the room. In less time than it has taken to describe these simultaneous events, he had seized the sobbing girl in his arms and was babbling as follows:

"Miss Tho—Pamela—Pam, you dearest and sweetest of all the little women in the world! Oh, darling, don't cry; but if you must, then cry on me—so! That's right, my precious; put your arms round my neck and hold me close. S—strangle me, b—but never, never let me go."

He stooped gradually, picked her up, and made for the couch. Just before he got there, he reached a small prayer rug of Persian design and of great value, one of many such oases in the large expanse of beautifully waxed flooring. The specified rug seemed to take sudden offense at Mr. Randolph's rude footfall. It took to itself wings and flew from under him. The crash of two of the choicest bits of Manhattan's humanity was terrific. Above the din of scattering furniture could be heard the peal of a girl's clear laughter, and presently a voice ringing merrily through half-swallowed sobs:

"M—my—what a b—bump!"

They sat on the floor, face to face, and matched a treble: "Ha! Ha! Ha!" with a heavy male: "Haw! Haw! Haw!"

The terrified Tomlinson burst in upon the scene and there are twenty-six adjectives that would have fitted the look on his countenance, the first five being "astounded," "scandalized," "amazed," "deprecating," "appalled."

"M—Master Robert! M—Miss Imogene!"

Pamela pointed one finger at him weakly, and was off again to tumble down another cascade of laughter. Tomlinson shook his solemn head from side to side in a grieved and palsied motion.

"Such doings! I never—no—I never!"

"Tomlinson is right," said Mr. Randolph solemnly, as he rose and helped Pamela to her feet. "I consider this the most astonishing sample of deportment that has come to my immediate attention for—for ten years." He turned to the unmollified servitor. "Tomlinson," he continued, still supporting the laughter-weakened Pamela with one arm, "I think it is due you to explain that Miss Thornton and I were merely rehearsing, or, rather reviving the occasion of our first meeting. It was sitting just as you found us that we first made each other's acquaintance a decade ago, except that the encounter took place on the western sidewalk of Fifth avenue at about the corner of Forty-eighth street. I trust that this information will clear up all doubts in your mind as to our sanity, and that you will now leave us to the settlement of certain personal affairs of great moment."

Tomlinson withdrew, still shaking his old head from side to side, and mumbling his opinion that the explanation, far from condoning an affront to what had once been an orderly establishment, was in the nature of a plant on his credulity. No sooner had he closed the door softly but firmly on the scene of wreckage than Mr. Randolph turned all his attention to the lady in his arms.

After a few moments, he laid his hands on her shoulders, held her at arm's length, and forced her eyes to a long and breathlessly solemn meeting with his own. "My dear girl," he continued, "when I came here this afternoon, the sudden bloom of your beauty swept me off my usually confident mental bearings. I saw how completely desirable you are and my courage sank and left me, as though some one had said, 'You can have her if you'll just step up to Mars.' When I was running away, so that I might live to fight for you in many other days, the flame of you swept down and seized my coward heart. It's yours, darling, forever—if you'll only take it!"

And then they kissed each other—one of those long, unhurried marriages

One of Those Long, Unhurried Marriages of the Lips.

of the lips in which eye meets wondering eye so closely that the barriers of flesh and space and time are pushed aside, and all the whole wide world together with seven heavens are crowded into the tiny sphere of a single lucent orb. Look at them, oh, you growing public; watch them do it! For while it is customary to draw the veil on these intimate first contacts of the soul, let it be said that such conventional literary hypocrisy is herein abjured on the grounds that the real thing in youth in love doesn't give a whoop who sees.

Even such a kiss as is under review has an end as well as a beginning, and just as this one finished its too brief but crowded span of life came the honk three times repeated of a motor horn, as though the world at large had availed itself of that means to rap the shameless osculation with three exclamation points.

"Why, Bobby!" cried Pamela, "you've never kept your cab waiting?"

"Sometime tonight," said Mr. Randolph dreamily, sadly, wistfully, "I'll have to go somewhere away from here. Let him wait."

[THE END.]

STOWE

Mrs James Brownice is in Montpelier.

Guy Holden, went last week Tuesday to accept a position in a creamery at Milton.

Miss Hattie Douglass, Lamoille county Red Cross nurse, was in Stowe Tuesday of of last week.

J. C. Benson attended the reunion of the 1912 Legislature in Montpelier last week Monday.

Walter Magoon, who recently underwent an operation at the Mary Fletcher hospital, has returned home.

Harvey Gale, who was injured several weeks ago while skiing, is gaining slowly and able to sit up a few minutes each day.

N. B. Robinson visited his mother, Mrs. Ruth Robinson and sister, Mrs. H. F. Simmons, in Burlington over Sunday.

Mrs. Harry Gibbs, who went to the Mary Fletcher hospital for treatment, was accompanied to Burlington by Mrs. A. L. Morrill.

Mrs. A J. Magoon went Monday to Burlington to visit Mr. Magoon, who is receiving treatment at the Mary Fletcher hospital.

Misses Beth Fuller of Northfield Falls and Ada Fuller of East Berkshire have been called home by the death of their sister, Hilda.

C. O. Burt returned last Wednesday from Burlington, where he has been staying with his young son at the hospital. The boy is making rapid recovery.

The Stowe firemen held a meeting at the banquet hall Tuesday evening of last week, when it was voted to postpone the annual meeting from March 17 to March 31.

Miss Merita Demeritt entertained 14 little friends at her home on Bridge street Saturday in honor of her 12th birthday, which occurred Monday. Games were played and refreshments served.

William H. Warren, who has been carrying on the Boyce farm for the past year, has purchased of G. N. Fisher the double tenement house which was formerly the lower village schoolhouse. Immediate possession will be given.

Community club number four, met with Mrs. Nina Shaw last Wednesday afternoon and re-organizad with the following officers: President, Mrs. Maube Pike; vice-president, Mrs. Addie Simmons; secretary, and treasurer, Mrs. Nina Shaw.

C. L. McMahon, who was in Burlington on business the first of last week, reports that there was much interest shown in the Stowe carnival pictures which were exhibited there last Tuesday. There were scenes of the tractor, the skiing and jumping.

Mrs. Eveline Wilkins fell at the home of her daughter, Mrs. F. M. Claire Monday, when she tripped over the rocker of a chair, striking on a pitcher. She sustained a severe cut on her upper lip. Several stitches were required to close the gash.

Members of Mansfield Camp, M. W. A., and families enjoyed a social entertainment at the banquet hall Thursday evening. Cards and games were played and a pleasant time enjoyed. The ladies furnished the lunch and maple sugar was served.

Frank Hart, son of Mr. and Mrs. Geo. Hart, and Miss Phoebe Story of Claremont, N. H, were quietly married Tuesday evening of last week, at the Community church parlors by the Rev. C. E. Hayward. Owing to the ill health of his father, Mr. and Mrs. Hart will reside on the farm for the present.

Eugene Shea, who has been visiting his sister, Mrs. F. E. Aspuith and family, has gone to Brooklyn, N. Y., where he will attend a series of meetings of the Missionary Alliance and will have charge of a choir composed of 50 trained voices. Mr. Shea anticipates holding similiar meetings in this vicinity this summer.

Clarence Hale ot Muskegon Heights, Mich., has been visiting his cousin, C. M. Watts, and other friends in Stowe, for several days. This is his first visit here since 46 years ago and it was a real pleasure to renew old acquaintances and a privilege to be treated to maple sugar on snow. Mr. Hale left Tuesday for Richmond, where he will visit a cousin, Mrs Fred Berry, thence to Malone, N. Y., on his return to Michigan.

The Busy Bee club met with Mrs. Fannie Faunce at Moscow Wednesday afternoon. Supper was served to 33 and cards were played in the evening, when ice cream and cake were served. The committee appointed to arrange for an entertainment to be given at the school house some time in April consisted of Mrs. Fannie Faunce, Mrs. William Adams, Mrs. Fred Moulton, Mrs. George Moulton and Mrs. A. E. Horner. The next meeting will be held April 6 with Mrs. W. W. Adams.

The regular meeting of Sickle Chapter No 34, O. E. S., was held at Masonic hall Wednesday evening of last week. Mrs. Addie Allen of Milton, grand matron, and Mrs. Kate Hull of Burlington, grand lecturer, were guests of the evening. A bountiful banquet was served at six o'clock to the members and was followed by initiation, when Mr. and Mrs. P. A. Raymond were received into the order. The grand officers were entertained by the worthy matron, Mrs. Minnie Tinkham and secretary, Mrs. Maude Pike.